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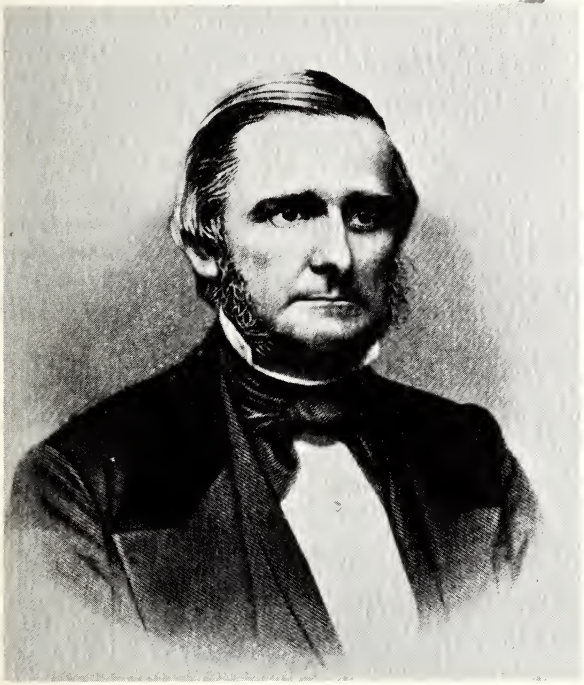


DEDICATION

OF A

MEMORIAL

TO

MOSES ASHLEY CURTIS

CHURCHYARD

ST. MATTHEWS EPISCOPAL CHURCH

HILLBOROUGH, NORTH CAROLINA

APRIL 25, 1970

4:00 P.M.

PUBLIC EVENING LECTURE

ON DR. CURTIS

STRUDWICK HALL

8:00 P.M.

DEDICATION

REVEREND LAUTON W. PETTIT
RECTOR OF ST. MATTHEW'S

INVOCATION

EULOGY OF MOSES ASHLEY CURTIS

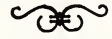
READING OF *Benedicite, omnia opera Domini*

Selected reading from HEBREWS, Chapter II

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

BENEDICTION

PUBLIC EVENING LECTURE
by
MRS. ROBERT B. COOKE
and
CHARLES H. BLAKE



Text of the Plaque

MOSES ASHLEY CURTIS
1808 1872

TEACHER - MINISTER - AUTHOR - SCIENTIST
SCION OF NOTABLE NEW ENGLAND FAMILIES
SYMPATHETIC TO THE CAUSE OF THE CONFEDERACY
MARRIED IN 1834 TO MARY deROSSET OF THE
DISTINGUISHED NORTH CAROLINA FAMILY
ORDAINED TO THE MINISTRY IN 1835
RECTOR: LINCOLNTON, 1835-1837; WASHINGTON, 1840-1841
HILLSBOROUGH, 1941-1847; 1856-1872
SOCIETY HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA, 1847-1856
A WORLD AUTHORITY ON FUNGI
IN 1867 HIS PUBLISHED LIST OF 4800 NORTH CAROLINA
PLANTS WAS THE LARGEST NORTH AMERICAN REGIONAL LIST

CURTIS MEMORIAL COMMITTEE
Mr. Alexander R. Shepherd, *Chairman*
Mr. and Mrs. Robert B. Cooke
Miss Rebecca B. Wall
Mrs. James Webb
Miss Annie Cameron
Mrs. Marion B. Roberts
Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Blake

MOSES ASHLEY CURTIS, D. D.
1808-1872

Moses Ashley Curtis, clergyman and scientist, born in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, May 11, 1808, was the son of Jared Curtis, graduate of Williams College, merchant, principal of Stockbridge Academy, long-time chaplain of the state prison at Charleston, Mass., and Thankful, daughter of General Moses Ashley. Mark Hopkins was a cousin.

A graduate of Williams College in 1827, Moses Ashley Curtis developed a lasting interest in the natural sciences under the influence of Professors Chester Dewey and Amos Eaton.

For two years following graduation, Moses Curtis taught in Massachusetts. From 1830-1833 he was engaged as a tutor in Wilmington, North Carolina, in the home of Edward B. Dudley, a wealthy shipper and merchant and later governor of this state. With Dr. James F. McRee he studied the varied flora of this coastal region. Assiduous plant collecting produced in less than two years Curtis' list of over 1,000 species of flowering plants entitled "Enumeration of Plants Growing Spontaneously Around Wilmington, North Carolina, with Remarks On Some New and Obscure Species," published in the Journal of the Boston Society of Natural History (May, 1835).

Music classes also engaged part of the young tutor's time and among his pupils was his future wife, a daughter of the prominent deRosset family, Mary Jane, whom he married on December 3, 1834.

Early in the winter of 1833 Moses Ashley Curtis began the study of theology under the Rev. William Croswell in Boston, returning to Wilmington in 1834 and continuing his studies with the Rev. Robert Brent Drane, Rector of St. James Episcopal Church. Ordained as a Deacon in Richmond, Virginia on May 31, 1835, he served in mission work in western North Carolina until the end of 1836, residing at Lincolnton. On missionary journeys in the section many specimens of piedmont flora were gathered for his growing herbarium.

From January, 1837, until early in 1840 Mr. Curtis was at the Episcopal School for Boys in Raleigh (now St. Mary's College), most of the time as headmaster of the school. At his ordination as Priest by Bishop Silliman Ives on May 26, 1839, in Christ Church, Raleigh, was sung an anthem "How Beautiful Upon the Mountains" which he had composed for use at his Diaconate ordination earlier. He was stationed at Washington, N.C., in 1840-41, and he wrote Asa Gray that he did little or no botanical work.

St. Matthew's Church, Hillsborough, called Mr. Curtis in 1841 where he remained until his death on April 10, 1872, except for the years 1847-1856 when he served at Trinity Episcopal Church, Society Hill, South Carolina. His manuscript "Birds of Society Hill, S.C., Landbirds and Waterbirds" attests to his continuing interest in other biological fields, as did his long-continued correspondence with eminent scientists of this country and abroad. These letters,

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which began in 1834, to John Torrey, Asa Gray, Edward Tuckerman, Jr., Henry William Ravenel, Miles Joseph Berkeley, and others form a large and important part of the 2100 items in the Curtis collection in the University of North Carolina Library at Chapel Hill.

Late in the 1830's Mr. Curtis decided to specialize in the study of the fungi, on which he published his first paper in 1848. This important and numerous assemblage of lower plants was then but poorly known in North America. He was soon collaborating with the accomplished English mycologist, the Rev. Miles Joseph Berkeley. They appear as joint authors of five important papers in the period 1851-1869. During the Civil War he tried to encourage the use of mushrooms for food and prepared a manuscript on the subject. This was illustrated with excellent colored drawings by his son, Charles. Asa Gray referred to Moses Curtis as "the highest American authority" on this group of plants.

Besides being an influential Episcopal clergyman, serving on Diocesan committees and as convention preacher and in demand as a lyceum speaker, the Rev. Moses Curtis was a man of varied interests. A composer and musician, playing the piano, flute, and organ, he sometimes also served as choirmaster. He was fluent in German, French, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin.

A devoted husband and father, the family often traveled to concerts in the large cities of the north as well as within the state. Only two of the Curtis' ten children, Moses Ashley and Mary Louisa, have descendants, some of whom live in North Carolina.

For his services in many fields of endeavor, Moses Ashley Curtis was awarded in 1852 the Doctor of Divinity degree by the University of North Carolina.

In 1857 Dr. Curtis served on the committee which selected the site for the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee. A member of the Board of Trustees from 1847 until his death in 1872, he faithfully undertook many arduous trips for meetings of the Board.

We can judge of Dr. Curtis' standing as a botanist through the respect which is evident in his relations with other botanists of his own day. Certainly Asa Gray, the most famous American botanist of his day, would hardly have corresponded so long with anyone whom he did not regard as having attainments of nearly his own level. This is even more true of Berkeley, who was also a mycologist. The respect of his contemporaries is shown by the material entrusted to him for description: the collection of the U. S. Exploring Expedition, Fendler's Venezuelan, Wright's Cuban specimens and others. Further, appreciative memoirs concerning Curtis have appeared as recently as 1919. Curtis achieved in his lifetime an international reputation in his chosen specialty and the passage of years has not dimmed that reputation. The originality and vitality of Dr. Curtis' work lives today in the sciences that he did so much to develop.